

A

REVIEW

OF THE

STATE

OF THE

BRITISH NATION.

Thursday, April 24. 1712

HAVING often spoken in this Paper of the Trade to *Africa*, and expos'd, as I flatter'd myself, Unanswerably, the Nations of the *Separate Traders*, I was answer'd with this knocking-down Argument — The House of Commons will lay open the Trade, and what's that to you?

This is indeed much such an Argument, as *Bellarmino* upon *Lycet*, or *Tarbox* for that; Power is always the best Conclusion of a bad Dispute — But I have not done with it so; tho' I have, it is true, nothing to do with what the *Parliament* will or will not do; yet the Old Company shall not die

without an Elegy — Nor the New rise, without a foreboding of their Progress; the *African Trade* shall not be lost to *Britain*, without some-body to tell you of it time enough to prevent it; and while these *Separate Traders* tell me the Fate of the Company, I'll tell them the Fate of theirs, let Time alone, to tell us all who is the best Prophet.

Perhaps the House of Commons do believe what you say, That you will Support the Trade and Preserve it: The House of Commons, tho' they are the Makers and Expositors of Law, were never the Guide of Opinion, and when they have receiv'd Satisfaction

Satisfaction enough to believe a Thing, they do not take it amiss that any private Man does not believe as they believe; tho' they are our National Council in Civil Affairs, they do not claim to be Infallible, nor do they Condemn those for Hereticks in Polity, who do not believe as they believe.

Wherefore, with Submission to whatever *the Parliament* do, or do not believe, as to the *Separate Traders* preserving the Trade in *Africa*, or to whatever the Parliament shall or shall not Enact, I do not believe, nor ever shall, till I see it Perform'd, that the *Separate Traders* will preserve this Trade to the Nation; nor do I herein Tax their Integrity, they will not, *Honest Men!* they cannot, it is not in the Nature of the Undertaking to do it, and which is more than all, they cannot give the Parliament any Reasonable Security that they will do it.

Let us Examine their Bill, and here I must premise, as my Duty to the House of Commons, that I look upon the Bill, as the Sum of what the *Petitioners* for an open Trade, desire and propose; I take it for granted, the House has order'd it to be Printed, that all People Concern'd might see it, and might so far judge of it, not that they should Reproach Parliamentary Proceedings, but that they might, if they see any Thing in it to Object, timely apply to the proper place, and lay their Objections before the House, who are the proper Judges of the Fact; and this is what I am doing, and no more; nor shall I say any Thing that can give an Offence to the House of Commons.

And first, I must confess, here is a Point in Morality, which I think will shock any Honest Man, even in the first Request the *Separate Traders* make to the Parliament, and which, in short is abominably Knavish, with their Pardon for the Expression, viz. Petitioning to take away the Lawfully possess'd Estate of another, without a Valuable Consideration — I might have said, the Estate of 2000 Families, but that is not of Moment here; he is as much a Thief

that Robs one Man, as a Thousand, and as much a Knave who Cheats one Man, as a Thousand.

Here's an Estate in Property: The *African Company's* Forts, Castles, &c. in *Africa*, are their Undoubted Property and Estate, nor can they be Divested of that Property, no, not even for a Publick Good, to put it into the Possession of another; no, nor for a Valuable Consideration without their Consent; for by *Magna Charta*, no Man can be Divested of his Right, till he is Convicted of some Crime, by which he forfeits that Right; and to force a Man to sell his Right, is as much an Oppression and an Injury, as to take it from him for nothing, only the Loss may not be so great.

Nor is this a Right in Possession, but this Possession is Mortgaged to others, for great Sums of Money actually paid and Advanc'd; for the Money lent on the Seal of the Company, is lent upon the Security of their Undoubted Right, both to the Trade, and more especially to their Property, in the Settlements on the Coast of *Africa*; and these Lenders are Injur'd in the highest degree, by taking away their Security, which ought, if no other Payment can be made, to be sold to pay those Debts.

Now for the *Separate Traders* to ask to have these Settlements given up, without the Consent of the Proprietors, is to ask, to Rob the Company of their Property, and to Rob the Creditors of their Security, which is contrary to Fundamental Right: It is true, that in sundry Cases, such as Enlarging Roads, Navigation of Rivers, Currents of Water, Fortifications, publick Edifices, and the like, Acts of Parliament have been thought Reasonable, to oblige Owners of Lands to part with such Parts of their Property, as are found N^eedful for such Works, at a Price adjudg'd by indifferent Persons; but it never has been known, that these Things have been done to Erect the same Improvement upon what they pull down; as to take away a Navigation of a River from one, to give it to another; or pull down one Man's Mill to build another's,

or

or one Man's Park to make another Park, but always on something remote from the Concern of the Person so Divested; but to take away the Right of the Proprietors in a *Plantation and Trade*, to carry on the same *Trade and Plantation* in their Room, is a Thing we have no Precedent for, that ever I heard of.

And therefore when they came to propose a Bill to the House of Commons, tho' they had long before had the Modesty to talk of taking away the Forts and Castles from the Company for a Trifle, yet finding such a Thing too gross to offer to a *Parliament*, they change their Note, and propose a Reference for the Purchaser, if the Company will part with *their Settlements*, and leaving them a Liberty, that if they will not, they may keep them; and these New Gentlemen to Contribute a Competent Sum Yearly, towards the Supporting and Maintaining, &c. Indeed they knew they could not talk to a *Parliament* in any other Language, for *Parliaments* often secure Men against Robbery, but never Plunder and Rob, or suffer other others to do so.

Well, this was an Article so Just, that they could not come off of it, but yet our *Separate Men* resolving to do every Thing that was Just, upon no other Foot, but because they could not help it, nor any more of what was so just, than they really could not help; let us Examine how they propose to Manage this Contribution and Competency, to Maintain the Company's Forts, &c.

1. They will Contribute a *Competent Summ*.
2. Towards such Forts, &c, as shall be Necessary.

I make no doubt, but when the House comes to sit upon this Bill, they will Demand of them what they call a *Competent Summ*; and what they mean by *Necessary*? If these Gentlemen can give a direct Answer to either of these Questions, I must own myself mistaken, and if the House passes the Bill, without a Satisfactory Answer on that point, I shall yet be more mistaken.

As to the Bill depending, I make no question the House will make it a good Bill, or not pass it, *I have nothing to do with that*; but as to these Gentlemen's Proposals, with great Submission, I cannot but observe two Things, Unprecedented and Intolerable in them. *First*, That they, on one Hand, are willing to give the Company leave to keep their *Settlements*, after they have got leave to take the Trade away from them. *Secondly*, That if the Company does, keep their *Settlements*, they would be made Judges both of what Forts shall be necessary, and how much shall be a *Competent Summ* to be Contributed to Maintain them; a *modest Desire* indeed?

I shall make no farther Observation on this, but leave it to its Fate in the House, where I can hardly think they will have the Face to ask such an Unlimited Power, as being made their own Judges and Juries in such a manner; and if they have, however the House may in favour to them nor *Resent* it, yet I doubt not, but in Justice, they will refuse the Thing.

The next Observation, I think, is yet more Remarkable, and this Respects nothing in the Bill at all, but something out of it, and which, I confess, I look'd wishing to have found there, and that is, the Old Word *Security*; what Security these People would offer to preserve the Trade? What Security to the Nation, that so Eminent a Branch of the *English Commerce* shall not be lost under their Management? This has been so often put home to them, and they have so shamefully evaded it, that at last, they could withstand the Reason of it no longer; and therefore in the Report from the Commissioners of Trade, we found they had made some Proposals for a Security but in the Draught of a Bill which I have seen Printed, there is not one Word of this Security; I believe the Security they were able to give, was so Absurd and Inconsistent, that they were ashamed to offer at putting it into the Bill. Let us then see how the Case is to stand *without Security*?

The *Forts and Settlements* are absolutely Necessary, *that they own*, and that without them the Trade cannot be preserv'd.

The Charge of these *Forts and Settlements* is to be paid by the Tax, or Mul^d, to be laid on the Merchandizes Exported by these New Traders, and the Fine for Freedoms, from whence I draw these short Conclusions.

The Charge is certain, the *Forts and Settlements* must be upheld, or the Trade which depends upon them will be lost.

The Money which the Company can raise is uncertain, because it is but a Proportion — per Cens, upon the Value of the Trade, and no Man is bound to Trade to a certain Value.

It is certain, no Man Trades but to Gain: If any Disaster attends Trade, as all Trade is subject to Disaster, so that no Advantage can be made, tho' but for a Time, the Merchants stop their Hands of course, for that time; if they stop the Trade the Supply stops, the *Forts* drop, and then where's the Trade? Where the Nation's Interest? Where your New Company?

I acknowledge this Question has been ask'd over and over, even till it is Threadbare; Where is the Security for the Trade? The Security to the Nation, that the Trade to Africa shall be Preserv'd? — We have ask'd it often — But has it been ever Answer'd? No, nor shall it ever be Answer'd while the World stands, but in an Exclusive Company: The *Separate Traders* offer'd once they would give Security, but they have thought fit to forget it, and now they are so far from binding themselves to it, that in this Bill there is an Express Clause, That the Merchants shall no way be Limited what Sort or Quantity of Goods they shall Export, &c. Nor can it be Reasonable to confine Men to Export their Goods, if the Trade does not Answer, and they cannot get by it.

If they are not Limited to the Quantity Exported, What if they do not Export

sufficient to raise a Summ able to Maintain the *Forts*? Then the Trade must die of course, as no doubt it would, if their Absurd Demands were to be granted; but as the Inconsistence of their Proposals has all along Embarrass'd the Cause, no Parliament has yet been able to pass a Law to their Mind, so I make no question, when this comes to be Examined into by the House, but Reason, Justice, and the common Interest will take place too much with the Parliament, to let the Ridiculous Notions of these Men prevail.

I do confess, the Creditors of the *African Company* have a hard Case here, and such a Case, as I do not remember ever came before a Parliament; I have seen many an Act of Parliament to Relieve Creditors against Fraudulent Conspiracies of Bankrupts, and against Men turn'd Bankrupts, on purpose to Rob their Creditors, but these Devourers seek to bring a Parliament in, to assist them to make Bankrupts, and Ruin the Creditors, that they may get the Estate into their own Hand.

After this, who will lend Money to Banks, Companies, or Corporation-Seals, if when the Money is lent, the Corporations shall be pull'd in pieces, and their Security, which consisted as well of their Trade as their Dead-Stock, taken away? When the New *East-India Company* was set up by Parliament, this was the same Case, and it could never have been adjusted, but by a Reconciliation of Parties, and Uniting the Companies at last.

All I have said, relates to the Unreasonable Proposals, or Demands, of the *Separate Traders*; which I think are not only Injurious, Oppressive, and Unjust to the Company, and especially to the Creditors, but Destructive of the Nation's Good, and Ruinous to the Trade; what the Parliament are doing is not the Case here; I doubt not, when the Particulars come to be heard before the House, Justice will take Place, and these Men must talk another Language, or be us'd as they Deserve.